

FORT SUMTER, S.C. A PLACE OF VALOR

By Joquita Burka



IT ALL STARTED SO VERY, VERY POLITELY. A NOTE WAS SENT TO MAJOR ANDERSON, U.S. COMMANDER OF FORT SUMTER.

Headquarters Provisional Army, C. S. A.
Charleston, April 11, 1861

Sir: The government of the Confederate States has hitherto foreborne from any hostile demonstrations against Fort Sumter, in hope that the government of the United States, with a view to the amicable adjustment of all questions between the two governments, and to avert the calamities of war, would voluntarily evacuate it....

I am ordered by the government of the Confederate States to demand the evacuation of Fort Sumter....

I am, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

G. T. BEAUREGARD
Brigadier General Commanding

IN RETURN, CONFEDERATE BRIGADIER GENERAL PIERRE G.T. BEAUREGARD RECEIVED THIS MESSAGE.

Fort Sumter, S.C.
April 11, 1861

General: I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your communication demanding the evacuation of this fort, and to say, in reply thereto, that it is a demand with which I regret that my sense of honor, and of my obligations to my government, prevent my compliance. Thanking you for the fair, manly and courteous terms proposed, and for the high compliment paid me, I am, General, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

ROBERT ANDERSON
Major, First Artillery, Commanding

At 3:20am on April 12, 1861, Brigadier General Beauregard warned Major Anderson that in light of the U.S. Army's refusal to evacuate Fort Sumter, firing would begin. At 4:30am, a single shot fired by Confederate forces from Fort Johnson in Charleston Harbor began a 34-hour bombardment and marked the beginning of four years of Civil War.

Though history attributes the beginnings of the Civil War to Fort Sumter, the issues of states' rights, slavery and sovereignty had been stirring since the Constitutional Convention. When Lincoln was elected in 1860, emotions erupted, and on Dec. 20, 1860, South Carolina delegates voted to secede—followed by a number of Southern states. The Confederate States of America was born.

attempts to recapture Fort Sumter, it was only the news of General Sherman's advance toward Charleston from Savannah that finally forced the fort's abandonment, just two months shy of the war's end.

Today, visitors to Fort Sumter will see only remnants of the original fort and its battlements. Originally designed to garrison 650 men with a 135-gun armament, much of the fort was reduced to rubble under the more than 7 million pounds of metal hurled at the post during that opening barrage and the ensuing Union bombardments from September 1863 to February 1865. The dominant structure on the site now is Battery Huger, a concrete gun emplacement built across the parade ground at the time



In the days immediately following secession, three of the four U.S. Army installations in Charleston Harbor were quickly occupied by Confederate troops. Only Fort Sumter remained in the hands of the Union troops under Anderson and 85 regular Army soldiers. That was to be short-lived. Less than 12 hours after those first shots had been fired, Anderson agreed to surrender. The combination of the bombardment and an advancing fire threatening to ignite the 300-barrel powder magazine proved to be more than the small force of Union troops could endure.

From April 14, 1861, to Feb. 17, 1865, four arduous years, Fort Sumter withstood numerous attempts by Union forces to regain this foothold. Charleston Harbor under Confederate control remained as the thorn in the side of Union forces who had successfully blockaded the rest of the East Coast. War supplies came in and cotton went out of this stubborn port, feeding the Southern war effort. Despite numerous

of the Spanish-American War.

As an island fortress, Fort Sumter is accessible to visitors only by boat. Guests may arrive by private craft or by the regularly scheduled cruises that depart from Patriots Point in Mt. Pleasant or from the National Park Service's Visitor Education Center in Charleston, which houses a number of displays about the time, the area, the war effort and the culture.

Today, it is the flag of the United States of America that flies over Fort Sumter. The harbor is dotted with sailboats. The chartered fishing boats pass. Seabirds circle overhead. All is quiet and peaceful. But it is impossible to step onto this small plot of land without a sense of reverence—of respect—for those who fought bravely on both sides of the conflict.

